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ABSTRACT
                The purpose of this study was to examine preservice teachers'
levels of awareness of self, other, and context and of social action options
in dealing with multicultural issues. Levels of critical thinking and self-
inquiry and levels of social action were studied as conceptualized by P.
Freire (1970) in his tenets of critical pedagogy. Participants were 30
education students. A majority of these students were only minimally to
moderately aware of the multicultural dynamics embedded in a critical
incident in their lives, and they were unable to identify or name societal
and systemic problems inherent in discriminatory practices. The primary
significance of this study is its support of the contention that one's level
of awareness, beliefs, and attitudes toward multicultural issues affect what
one knows and how one experiences that knowing. Support was also found for
the idea that social action could not be considered unless there is a
sustained period of critical thinking and self-inquiry. (Contains 16
references.) (SLD)

Critical Thinking Requires Critical Doing: An Analysis of

Students' Multicultural Experiences within Freire's Framework

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2

Critical Thinking Requires Critical Doing: An Analysis of Students' Multicultural Experiences within Freire's Framework

Introduction

National initiatives aimed at educational reform challenge schools, colleges, and universities to be centers of excellence in learning for all students. As part of that challenge the need for creating safe, inclusive learning environments becomes integral to the success of educational institutions. With reform comes the added challenge to create a broad-based and shared responsibility for improving educational practices. The increasing racial and ethnic diversity among students in the United States coupled with a homogenous teaching population have confounded and complicated this challenge. The disparities between the children of diverse backgrounds who now populate our schools and a teaching force of predominately while females have a profound impact on the teaching-learning context. The diversification of the school population is expected to continue as overall immigration rates and birth rates for Asian and Latino cultural groups continue to increase while the demographic make-up of the teaching force is expected to remain predominately white and female.

The need for alternative instructional pedagogical methodology in teacher education is apparent as evidenced by the increased emphasis on what knowledge, skill and dispositions are needed to effectively teach diverse learners (Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996) and the need to become culturally competent (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Inclusive education is too complex and multifaceted an issue to be transformed by any single educational program or strategy. However, carefully conceptualized and implemented multicultural education can have a substantive and beneficial impact on the

educational experiences of most students (Nieto, 1996). Using Freire's (1970) critical

thinking and social action framework as a base for increasing cultural competence of

educators and constructing alternative pedagogy, the purpose of this study was to

examine pre-service education students' levels of awareness of self, other, and context as

well as awareness of social action options in dealing with multicultural issues.

Review of Literature

Despite the development and implementation of numerous school-based

initiatives, multicultural education remains an excruciating and difficult issue for most

pre-service and in-service teachers (Nieto, 1996). Magner (1996) found that while

appearing more liberal and supportive of the importance of diversity, a "majority of

professors do not touch on race or gender in their teaching and research" (p. A12). .

Further, Freire, in his classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), asserted that

freedom is often confused with the maintenance of the status quo in society. However,

some colleges and universities are responding to the critical need to adapt their

instructional models and course content to better prepare educators to handle increasing

diversity in classrooms (Howard & Denning del Rosario, 1998; Lawrence & Tatum,

1997). The reality is that many adaptations generally focus on superficial aspects of

teaching diverse populations (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002). Confronting issues of

power inequities, differences, and one's own contributions to the status quo make critical

thinking and social action a difficult and complex process for anyone.

The journey toward multicultural education must involve teacher educators, in-

service, and pre-service teachers becoming more aware and comfortable with their own

diverse backgrounds. Nieto (1996) asserts that by going through a re-education

4

concerning their own diverse backgrounds and histories, educators can lay the

groundwork for students to claim and integrate their own background and experiences.

Educational scholars (Coburn, 1989; Ivey, Ivey, & Sinek-Morgan, 1993; Pedersen, 1988;

Sue, 1992) agree that effective cross-cultural communication is based on understanding

attitudes, beliefs, and worldview from which one's own responses emerge as well as

understanding the attitudes, beliefs and worldview of others. Additionally, Freire (1970)

postulated that people change and develop only by rethinking their personal assumptions

and actions and he called this process of reflection and action upon the world in order to

transform it, "praxis" (p.45).

Freire's model of critical pedagogy, with its emphasis on critical thinking and

social action, was chosen as the framework for this investigation. In particular, critical

thinking involves development of diverse perspectives by learning to think inclusively

and expansively while simultaneously being engaged in purposeful reflection on newly

emerging insights. Being able to effectively initiate and facilitate dialogue involving

diversity and race issues requires the ability to critically examine personal beliefs,

opinions, and values about one's own racial identity as well as the race of others (Howard

& Denning del Rosario, 1998). This process invites immersion experiences that are

necessary before purposeful action for social justice and change can be taken.

Effective multicultural education occurs within the context of a pluralistic society.

This stands in contrast to the traditional practice of treating diversity with a "separatist

approach" which tends to downplay the role of students as active pursuers of ideas and

instead teaches diversity in an isolated fashion (Tisdell, 1995). The connections of

power, oppression and social structure inequities to self, others, and context are not

considered or emphasized in the separatist approach. For effective cross-cultural

communication and education to occur, educators must understand the attitudes and

beliefs from which their own response emerge as well as understand those of others.

Pedersen (1988) asserted that it is necessary to integrate both the awareness and

knowledge of self, others, and context into the development of cross-cultural skills and

competency. The awareness component requires that educators examine their own

myths, attitudes, beliefs, worldview, and stereotypes. Knowledge enhancement involves

the conceptualization of non-stereotyping perspectives of cultural and social dynamics of

diverse groups. The political, economic, and historic contexts in which people from

various cultures are ingrained must also be understood. Skill development is evidenced

by the implementation of culturally sensitive and empowering methods and strategies that

are reflected in one's verbal and nonverbal communication related to teaching, learning,

and advocacy. Increasing awareness of one's attitudes and beliefs about multicultural

issues is the critical first step in successfully relating to culturally diverse populations;

thus, ascertaining the attitudes, beliefs, and worldview of pre-professional educators is a

vital and necessary step in constructing instructional models that address cultural

competence. Researcher conducting this investigation used a Critical Incident Analysis

protocol as a vehicle for pre-professional education students to rethink their personal

assumptions and actions related to a personally experienced incident involving a

multicultural issue. Based on the premise that critical self-inquiry and social action are

the foundation for cultural competency and effective multicultural education, this study

examined the levels of awareness of self, other, and context as well as social action skills

of pre-service, senior-level education students in dealing with multicultural issues.

Method

This qualitative study incorporated Freire's (1970) empowerment model of reflective inquiry, consciousness, and critical intervention whereby each student recalled a personally experienced critical incident involving a cross-cultural issue. This approach encompassed Freire's problem-posing methodology along with a structured analysis. Specifically, the recalled incident was to be described in detail by addressing the following questions: (1) Describe the diversity or cross-cultural situation you experienced; (2) Describe in detail the events as they occurred including the sequence as it unfolded and indicating what, when, where, how, and why the events took place; (3) Indicate the cultural status of the person(s) involved in the situation and describe their relationship to one another; (4) Specify how you reacted to and/or handled the situation; (5) Explain the diversity issues that arose from the situation; and (6) Describe how you think the situation could have best been addressed.

The participants for this investigation included 30 education students attending a mid-sized rural, southeastern university. Twenty-one percent of the participants were male and 79% were female. Sixty-two percent were persons of color and 38% were white. The ages of the students ranged from 21 to 24 years. Using a case study narrative, students were instructed to recall a personal experience involving a diversity issue. Students were given 50 minutes to write a detailed account of their experience and the option to address any diversity issue they desired be it race, age, sexual orientation, religion, ability, etc.

The written narratives provided the data for analysis. A theoretical editing analysis protocol was used to analyze data and to develop conceptual themes (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This methodology framed the investigators' search for meaningful segments of text that were then sorted and organized into patterns and theme categories. Investigator triangulation began with each investigator independently analyzing the narratives into provisional themes and categories. These themes and categories were subsequently reexamined jointly by the researchers and reorganized into final conceptual themes. The themes were validated and cross checked within and across categories. The researchers then participated in a professional peer debriefing. The contributions of the peer debriefing were useful for enhancing conceptual themes. In addition, students participated in a two-hour member check discussion in which the researchers encouraged them to share any additional insights that may have occurred since writing the narrative and to judge the accuracy of the researchers' findings. This process mirrored Freire's problem-posing methodology of identifying and naming the social problem, analyzing the causes of the social problem and in some cases finding solutions to the social problem. Students were active agents engaged in the discovery and development of their own knowledge in a dialogical format.

Findings

This study examined the students' levels of critical thinking and self-inquiry (CTSI) and their levels of social action (SA) as conceptualized by Freire (1970) in his central tenets of critical pedagogy. High-level critical thinking and self-inquiry was operationally defined as the students' ability to recognize and articulate the value of diversity among people, perceive these differences as valuable and positive, and

recognize when people were treated inequitably due to their diversities. At the mid-level

critical thinking and self-inquiry category were students who saw diversities among

people but did not see or accept the values of the differences nor did they see the uneven

application of fairness and justice. Students who saw people as homogeneous and thus

saw similarities among people while downplaying their differences characterized the

third category, low-level critical thinking and self-inquiry. This assimilationist and

colorblind perspective was reflected in not having thought critically about diverse

perspectives and thus seeing little value in them.

The second critical theme, social action, was evidenced in students' narratives

when they recognized that inequities based on diversity existed, saw to it that social

action was taken to address the inequity, or took personal or social action to address the

inequity. This concept was similar to levels of empowerment described by Wallerstein

(1992) that include intrapsychic elements such as self-efficacy and perceptions of

empowerment, motivation to exert control, and actual skill development to bring about

change.

High-level CTSI characterized 18% of the students while 66% were assessed to

be in the mid-level CTSI category. Sixteen per cent of the students' narratives placed

them in the low-level CTSI category. An example of high-level CTSI involved a

restaurant manager and the way she handled an incident of discriminatory behavior

demonstrated by a waitress under her supervision. When the manager was made aware

of a White waitress's rudeness exhibited toward a Black couple who sat in her assigned

area, her immediate action was one of apology to the couple and a promise to address the

situation. This was followed by a documented account of the incident. The next day she

and the other manager sat with the waitress and discussed the incident, her behavior and her employment. Less than one-fifth of the students had achieved this level of awareness.

Inequities were also recognized at a moderate level as demonstrated by students who saw differences among people but did not embrace the value of the differing perspectives. These students had the tendency to see one element of inequity while remaining blind to other others. One example came from a 24 year-old Black female whose White co-workers were making racial comments about the Hispanics that came in the store. The student reported a feeling of discomfort but was not able to more specifically describe her response. She knew it was racial but the level of awareness was vague and passive. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were classified in this range.

Those at the low level of awareness tended to discount differences and inequities and see only the fairness to the majority principle. One student reported that new management at a grocery chain had changed the policy of working on the floor and distributing produce of an all-male force to one where both males and females worked side by side. When asked how this was a cross cultural issue, he did not see that the former situation was discriminatory but only commented that the reassignments helped relieve some of the stress on the guys and helped with scheduling too. Approximately one in six participants held similar levels of limited awareness.

Ten percent of students were classified as high-level SA, whereas 37% were at mid-level SA. The mid-level SA differed from the high-level SA in that they saw that inequities existed but they did not take personal or social responsibility in addressing this

condition. Low-level SA characterized 53% of students. With a minimal recognition of inequities, these students saw no need for personal or social action.

When students clearly saw inequities and intolerance and then took personal responsibility and action, high-level SA was demonstrated. One such incident involved a 22 year-old Black female, three and one-half months pregnant, working as a cashier in a supermarket. A newly hired floor manager asked her to clean her area and she agreed to do so. However, when she found that she was to clean it with a brush and isopropyl alcohol, she refused because of the fumes and her pregnancy. After insisting again with the same response from the student, the manager called her into his office. He asked her again to clean her area and getting the same negative response, he told her to get her things and go home. Before leaving she wrote a note to the store manager explaining what had happened and indicated that she would return the next day to talk with him. When she did return the next day, the store manager fired her. Her next action was to call the store's main office. They in turn addressed the situation and rescinded the action of the managers. This incident showed not only a willingness to take social action; it demonstrated persistence in the face of repeated challenges to her intensifying social actions. Only one in ten reported such a level of personal responsibility and persistence in social action.

An example of moderate SA was one in which a participant witnessed two teen aged White males verbally harassing Hispanic patrons in a department store. The reaction of this 21 year-old female was to report it to the manager who in turn did not respond to the incident in any overt way. The next reaction by the participant was pivotal in classifying this in the moderate range. Her response was one of anger and the

statement, "I felt as though there should have been some type of investigation and he should have taken disciplinary action." In this case some action was taken but there was no recognition of responsibility for personal social action. Thirty-seven per cent of this group responded at this moderate level.

Low-level SA characterized over half of the participants' responses to critical incidents. One example involved a 22 year-old White female at a Christmas party for the athletic store where she worked. The owner of the store came up to her and made what she called "extremely inappropriate and unprofessional" comments that he would not have made to the male employees. The statements were made in a way that showed he was trying to be complimentary but the student was completely embarrassed and further stated that "thank goodness it wasn't a situation in which there was any actual contact and I was in a room full of other people." She commented that she tried to ignore him but couldn't help but feel furious. Her chosen action was to show him her displeasure in her facial expression and walk away. When asked what action should have been taken, she indicated maybe telling someone else but she really did not see an appropriate action. There was some awareness of inequities but no real thought as to having a choice to respond in a proactive manner.

Discussion

The data collection and dialogic inquiry to validate conceptual themes became the alternate pedagogy that addressed the teaching and learning of multicultural competence. The dialogue allowed for the presentation of multiple perspectives and reflection on one's own as well as others' experience. This process reflected Freire's (1998) perspective that

"to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge" (p. 49).

A majority of these students were only minimally to moderately aware of the multicultural dynamics embedded in a critical incident in their life and unable to identify and/or name societal and systemic problems inherent in discriminatory practices. These results are similar to the findings of Smith-Maddox and Solorzano (2002) that addressed "the ideological blinders prospective teachers may have developed as a result of their own cultural and educational experiences" (p. 79). Freire (1970) pointed out a similar limited view perspective when he said that freedom is often confused with the maintenance of the status quo in society. Thus, the limited perspectives of these educators needed to be addressed in a dialogic manner so as to promote critical thinking, self-inquiry and social action choices.

Conclusions

In this study the critical incident analysis was the baseline assessment and the two-hour member check became the vehicle to engender critical thinking and self-inquiry. This listening-dialogue approach with the students became the process of listening to others' life experiences and making students the co-investigators of shared learning in the classroom community. This type of listening was a highly participatory and active process that revealed issues of emotional and social significant and the dialogue itself helped promote increased self-awareness, knowledge, critical thinking, and social action choices.

Overall, a majority of the participants fell within the moderately aware range of critical thinking and self-inquiry where diversity was not particularly valued nor were the inequities in the application of fairness and justice recognized. Additionally, ninety per cent of the participants saw only a moderate to minimal awareness of inequities and little to no need for personal or social action. The levels of awareness were relatively low for a group of educators about to embark on their teaching careers. Accompanying this level of critical thinking and self-inquiry were even lower levels of social action imperatives. The call for culturally competency (McAllister & Irvine, 2000) of the teaching force may still be unanswered.

The primary significance of this study was its support of the contention that one's level of awareness, beliefs and attitudes toward multicultural issues affect what one knows and how one experiences that knowing. Additionally, support was found that social action could not be considered until there is a sustained period of critical thinking and self-inquiry. Consistent with the findings of this study, documentation in the literature also recommends that before individuals can take a social action, they must first experience critical thinking and self-inquiry (Feire, 1998; Tatum, 1992). Although social action is the long-term aim of multicultural or liberatory education (Freire, 1970), this investigation pointed to the imperative to consider the differing levels multicultural awareness and competencies. Both pre-service and in-service teachers must first experience critical thinking and self-inquiry in order to fully recognize their own attitudes, views and assumptions about their own and others' diverse cultures. Inaccurate information, stereotypes, and prejudices must be called into question and addressed as

well as adequate time given to develop critical awareness, (Pedersen, 1988) in order to provide the foundation for effective social action.

To mandate change or new perspectives without first establishing a foundation of critical consciousness ignores the vital obligation of teacher educators to help learners become aware of the cultural contradictions that oppress them and others. To skip over the vital initial step of awareness or to dismiss it prematurely in favor of knowledge or skill building is likely to be counterproductive and create resistance. When students have an awareness of differing perspectives, they then have a foundation for understanding how knowledge or a set of "facts" can be interpreted differently, depending on the student's perspective (Jackson, Carroll, & Griffin, 2001).

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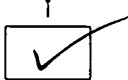
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